

Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Boards and Commissions Room, City Hall

6:00pm - 8:00pm

SPAB Members Present: Celeste Gilman, Chair; Ben Smith, Vice-Chair; Mark Bandy; Howard Wu; Tom Williams; Chris Tachibana, Secretary; Paul Niebanck; T. Frick

Also present: Jim Curtin, SDOT liaison to SPAB, Brian Lee (SBAB Liaison), Jacob Strusma (Feet First)

Sound Transit Representatives and Presenters: Michelle Ginder, Jeff Munnoch, Rich Johnsrud (Parsons Brinckerhoff), Carol Doebling

Absent: Petaki Cobell, Get Engaged

1. Introductions and Approval of January Meeting Minutes (6:03)

2. Public Comment (6:06)

Jacob noticed how treacherous Roosevelt is with holes, breaks, garbage cans and trees. Chris commented that the sidewalk is narrow. Celeste will pass that on to the University Transportation Area study.

3. Sound Transit Capitol Hill and Husky Stadium Stations (6:05)

Michelle discussed background and Capitol Hill design. The University link is a 3.15 mile extension linking Capitol Hill, the University of Washington (UW) and downtown. It is half-way through 2-year final design process and expected to be complete 6.5 years after construction begins in 2016. It connects downtown, Cap Hill/Seattle University and the UW. Expected boardings are 14,000 daily at Cap Hill, and 25,000 at UW, carrying about 114,000 daily by 2030. Times will be 6 minutes Cap Hill to downtown; 9 minutes UW to downtown.

The Cap Hill Station will be under Nagle Place with entrances at John and Broadway, Denny and Nagle, the west side of Seattle Central Community College. Nearby construction staging areas are being purchased now. About half of users will enter via the north entrance at John, through a plaza with 20-foot sidewalks, to ticket and information, down to a mezzanine via stairs, escalator or elevator and then to the platform. The Denny entrance will serve Cal Anderson park, and be elevator and stairs only from surface to platform. The west SCCC entrance will have 20 bike parking spaces and lockers for 4 bikes. This entry/exit is stairs or elevator down and escalator up. An underground pedestrian walkway will go under Broadway. Jeff gave landmarks for the stations as a former Chang's grill, north of Twice Told Tales, the NW corner of Cal Anderson Park.

Brian asked what would happen to the construction staging areas after completion. Michelle said development and Rich said the plan is mixed retail.

T. and Jim asked about dimensions and depths. The platform is 560 feet long, average 65 feet below surface. Depth of digging will be 85 feet. Jim and Mark discussed how trucks removing dirt will affect pedestrians. T. asked about the impact of 6.5 years of construction on park use. Rich said construction fences will keep the south entrance and sidewalk to the park open. Part of the Nagle sidewalk will be closed. Sidewalks on Broadway will be open.

Celeste asked if 24 bicycle spaces will be expanded for the expected 14,000 daily users. Michelle and Rich said they are in discussion about a space now owned by SCCC.

Howard asked about links to the planned streetcar extension. Michelle said there is a proposed nearby stop on Broadway.

Rich said the University station would be at Montlake Blvd and Husky Stadium. The station is larger because it incorporates a crossover track and it is 100 feet deep. Bus stops are at Pacific and Pacific Place and 520, bringing pedestrians and bicyclists from the south, and the Burke-Gilman trail passes by the area. Trolleys go around the triangle of Montlake/Pacific/Pacific Place. Plans include parking for 110 bikes, with 20 on the plaza at the south entrance.

Access to the station will include a curved pedestrian bridge over the north end of the triangle and Rainier Vista area. The plan is for an open-railed bridge that is 16 feet wide at the narrowest point. Ticket purchases will be at the end of the ped bridge, at the plaza and mezzanine. Construction staging will be in a current parking lot that will be turned back to university properties. Sound Transit is working with the UW in their stadium expansion and Rainier Vista improvement plans.

Brian asked about lighting. The bridge will be open 24 hours a day and lit.

Celeste asked about game days. Rich said they are working with the UW athletic department. The bridge can't accommodate everyone going into the stadium, but right now, bus loading and unloading is at street level on Montlake and will continue that way.

T. asked about stairs and bike/ped lane markings. Since the north end of the ped bridge does not have stairs, bikes will use it. Rich said the bridge will include signs and paving to indicate pedestrian areas and upcoming stairs. T. asked about wheelchair access. In addition to stairs, there are elevators and escalators. Mark asked if bridge elevators would be open 24 hours. Rich said they probably would be or would have closure alerts.

Wayfinding and platform access will include crossing escalator design to equalize distribution along the platform, textured tiles and lines to indicate boarding areas, public service announcements, visual and audible safety systems and signage.

Ben asked about the grade crossing at Pacific Street. Rich said that intersection is under study but will be maintained and upgraded. During construction, it will be used by trucks with temporary and then permanent upgrades, including enlarged crosswalks and islands. Ben said all intersections around the bridge should remain crossable. Ben asked about wayfinding to guide people going to the hospital. Rich said the existing pattern is from parking near the Stadium to the hospital. The new plaza will give access at street level to the intersection, and landscaping and improvements will discourage mid-block crossing.

Celeste asked about emergency call stations for the bridge, which would be 550 feet long. There is a stairwell half-way, but it is still a long distance without escapes. T asked about seating. Rich said traffic won't be that heavy, but Mark and T. said crowds would be a problem at certain times and seating might be needed for people with limited mobility. Ben suggested benches pulled away from ped traffic at midpoint.

Mark asked how the earlier plan of an undercrossing became a bridge and why the bridge is considered better. Rich said considerations were faster and easier construction with less impact; security concerns with a 550 foot tunnel; visibility and orientation issues in a tunnel; the need for closures when the link wasn't running; cost of maintenance, ventilation; the amount of materials required. Mark was worried the demand would be greater than the bridge capacity and said the bridge was awkward and would impede flow, with people having to change elevation so drastically from platform to bridge. He pointed out the heavy pedestrian and bike traffic already in the area, and said the bridge will attract additional, non-light rail traffic. He felt the design did not consider long-term issues, including potential increases in ridership.

Tom asked how much money is saved with the bridge. Rich estimated a couple of million dollars. Tom asked if all funding was secured and contingency factors. Funding appears to be secured and Sound Transit will get contingency numbers.

Celeste asked about predictions about bridge use and level of service including on game days. ST will get that information.

Jacob said the current bus tunnel has no Braille maps or directional signage, the tiles don't help and announcements are disorienting. He liked the previous tunnel design and said planning must include directional information at escalators and entrances/exits. Rich said they are incorporating lessons learned from earlier designs.

4. Pedestrian Master Plan Discussion (6:55)

Paul and Celeste are liaisons and advisory to the Ped Master Plan Advisory Group (PMPAG). So far, there is nothing concrete to comment on. Paul suggested that we consider basic values in city design regarding pedestrians. He's been frustrated about current planning for many years, including when he taught urban design. He'd like to see a Ped Master Plan that advocates design that integrates aesthetics and pedestrian design and makes for a more delightful, progressive city and would like to know what and how SPAB can contribute.

Paul had a worksheet with questions for SPAB members to answer about basic principles and visions about the future of Seattle and how the Ped Master Plan and SPAB can help achieve them. He and Celeste will take these comments and process them after general discussion. Questions addressed basic concerns and hopes for Seattle; what's essential to achieving goals; practical ideas to get going and stay on track; who should implement and guide achievements; how the Master Plan can be influential; the responsibility and authority of SPAB; and any other concerns.

Ben commented on his worksheet answers and liked Paul's idea of a public community that can take place outdoors. Walking to work gets him out on the streets and he'd like other people to enjoy that as well. His principle is the idea of the public realm and walking as a way to get around. His positive example is Benaroya Hall and his negative is University Village which is a parking lot with some walkways. He believes developers should agree that pedestrians are their customers and the city should apply guidelines. The Ped Plan can contribute awareness and ownership to prevent watering down of principles and plans as he's seen with the Bike plan. SPAB can champion the plan. He said measurements, evaluations and assessments after improvements need to be included.

Mark said he loves the urban and natural surprises of Seattle and daily involvement in natural and human environments. Providing local pathways and ways of getting to other parts of the city by walking and transit will improve the city and achieve his goals. He wants to be able to get places without being required to drive. In practical terms, going out the door and having an immediate walking environment would help. The Master Plan should evolve, for example via web or with podcast distribution like the walking tours for the sculpture garden. He'd like to see advisories, documents and plans be less department-specific and more owned by the entire city. Jim said he experienced lack of departmental coordination recently in working with different departments.

T added solidifying a Seattle identity with a sustainable social, economic and ecological plan that allows us to be proactive. She put a high priority on community health. She said the pedestrian experience should include constant variety for an experience of discovery. This affects safety, because attracting more pedestrians equals a safer environment. Practically, the Plan needs an urban vision, the city and departments need to work together and provide continuity, policy and economic support for this goal. The Plan needs to be more than information gathering and policy.

She said by the 2012 initiative, climate change goals will be imperative and need to be considered. SPAB must be proactive rather than reactive and help review design and quality.

Celeste's priorities were allowing people and children to explore their communities without fear. Practically, this requires networks and workably designed, tame but lively pedestrian streets. She suggested the Mayor, Council and SDOT reduce road widths and speed limits and make other design changes. The Master Plan should involve stakeholders and be a whole-systems view considering physical, climate, social connections. Each person should connect to a piece of it. The Master Plan should be SPAB's charter, setting directions and encouraging us to keep it alive.

Howard wanted to add the importance of designing an environment that allows meeting of public and private realms and having a common idea of what the streetscape would be.

Paul stated several concerns and ideas: a larger staff budget for SPAB; that PMPAG, with its diversity, be considered a focus group that could work with his worksheet and its results. Ben said his impression was that PMPAG was not unified. Paul thought agreement was possible and would empower the group regardless of conflicting interests.

Paul brought up the light rail link as a practical application to these points. Mark said the Capitol Hill station was well designed, with its connections. A minor concern is limited number and placement of bike parking. He said the UW station does not suit the long-term goals in our discussion. He brought up a couple of positive and negative examples of connected and non-connected areas (South Lake Union, Belltown). Paul said each new building should be considered in terms of pedestrian life.

Worksheets were collected and ideas will be presented when Celeste and Paul get a chance to talk to PMPAG.

5. Announcements (7:55)

Celeste's work plan was approved and will be distributed to everyone SPAB met with, and to other contacts in the city. Ben suggested removing personal contacts and putting it on the website.

Celeste had a draft pamphlet and walking survey from PMPAG. Paul asked about the origin and funding. Celeste and Jim said it originated from neighborhood walks but was highly processed through PMPAG and it's funded through the Ped Master Plan. Barbara Gray can provide more information. Comments on the draft should go to Celeste and Jim, who will find out the deadline.

T asked about another monthly SPAB walk, possibly Northgate. Mark suggested New Holly. T suggested comparison with High Point. Mark will coordinate.

Paul thanked T and Chris for notes.

Howard said the SBAB reviewed the Thomas Street overpass. Construction is expected Oct - July 2009. It will be 10-feet wide with lighting through the handrails.

6. Upcoming Agenda Items (8:05)

Paul suggested inviting planners for Yesler Terrace.

T will bring snacks next time.

Jim said Alaskan Way Viaduct/Central Waterfront Planning wants to present.

In April, Jodie Vice will present on the Council's Pedestrian Safety Campaign.

7. Adjourn (8:10)